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Editorial: Don't give in to terrorists

It's hard to believe, but this story starts not with a hard-hitting documentary, or even a heart-wrenching drama, but a comedy film.

"Under the threat of terrorist attacks from hackers and with the nation's largest multiplex chains pulling the film from its screens, Sony Pictures Entertainment took the unprecedented step of canceling the Dec. 25 release of the 'The Interview,'" reported Jake Coyle, film writer for The Associated Press. "The cancellation, announced Wednesday, was a startling blow to the Hollywood studio that has been shaken by hacker leaks and intimidations over the last several weeks by an anonymous group calling itself Guardians of Peace."

The movie in question stars James Franco and Seth Rogen as a celebrity journalist and his producer who are involved in a harebrained, CIA scheme to assassinate North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. On Wednesday, David E. Sanger and Nicole Perlroth of The New York Times reported the actual North Korea may have been behind the cyberattacks.

"Senior administration officials, who would not speak on the record about the intelligence findings, said the White House was still debating whether to publicly accuse North Korea of what amounts to a cyberterrorism

campaign,” they reported. “Sony’s decision to cancel release of ‘The Interview’ amounted to a capitulation to the threats sent out by hackers this week that they would launch attacks, perhaps on theaters themselves, if the movie was released.”

Others, including Wired’s Kim Zetter, weren’t convinced of North Korea’s complicity.

“The public evidence pointing at the Hermit Kingdom is flimsy,” she reported Wednesday. “It’s easy for attackers to plant false flags that point to North Korea or another nation as the culprit.”

If it does turn out to be the North Koreans behind this attack, it will only prove totalitarianism has no sense of humor. This isn’t surprising as it has always been that way. What is shocking is the cowardice shown in the face of this threat. How shameful of Sony to buckle to the pressure of the cyberterrorists. Freedom of speech and freedom from censorship are two bedrock American principles. What precedent does this set for the future? This may have started with a comedy, but this response isn’t amusing in the slightest.